HEALTH AND SAFETY FACTSHEET

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SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

Managing fatigue at work.

Work on a vineyard can make you tired. If you don't take care, and you continue to work whilst tired, then you might put yourself at risk of injury due to fatigue. Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy, it is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion which reduces your ability to work safely and effectively. It can occur because of extended mental or physical activity, sleep loss and/or disruption of your internal body clock. It can be caused by factors which may be work related, non-work related or a combination of both and can accumulate over time.

FATIGUE CAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH

Fatigue reduces alertness which leads to errors and an increase in the likelihood of incidents and injuries. This can occur whilst operating a car or tractor, when performing critical tasks that require a high level of concentration, or during night or shift work when a person would normally be asleep.

The effects of fatigue can be short or long term. In the short term a worker may show the signs or report the symptoms of fatigue such as:

- excessive yawning or falling asleep at work
- having short term memory problems or unable to concentrate
- not engaging effectively in conversations
- poor decision-making and judgment
- reduced hand-eye coordination or slow reflexes
- other changes in behaviour, for example repeatedly arriving late for work
- increased rates of unplanned absence.

The longer term health effects of fatigue can include:

- heart disease
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- gastrointestinal disorders
- lower fertility
- anxiety
- depression.

FATIGUE RISK FACTORS

Fatigue occurs naturally where our brain and body are telling us that we need to rest and recover. Given that fatigue can negatively impact on risk taking, safety, and immune status, fatigue is part of the body's defence mechanisms reminding us of the need to stop and rest.
Factors that may result in fatigue include:

- poor sleep quality and/or quantity
- workload that is too low (i.e. boring) or too high (i.e. overwhelming)
- Poor nutrition, lack of hydration
- work schedules that limit the time a worker can physically and mentally recover from work
- working in harsh and uncomfortable conditions
- health conditions such as anaemia, fibromyalgia or depression, and
- non-work related factors such as a worker's lifestyle and family responsibilities.

STEPS TO PREVENT HARM

While the risk cannot be removed, things can be done to reduce it. Some options an employer can consider include:

Work Scheduling

- Design working hours and rosters to allow for good sleep opportunity and enough recovery time between work days or shifts.
- Safety critical work is scheduled outside the low body clock periods between 2am and 6am.
- Plans are in place to deal with workload changes due to absenteeism.
- Have access to on-call workers for unplanned leave, emergencies or where workload increases.
- Make sure workers have and take adequate and regular breaks to rest, eat and rehydrate.

Job Demands

- Make sure fit-for-purpose plant, machinery and equipment is used at the workplace.
- Redesign the job to limit periods of excessive mental or physical demands
- Introduce job rotation to limit a build-up of mental and physical fatigue
- Develop contingency plans for potential situations where workers may have to unexpectedly work longer hours, more shifts or a long sequence of shifts

Environmental Conditions

- Avoid working during periods of extreme temperature or minimise exposure time through job rotation.
- Provide a cool area where workers can take a rest break and rehydrate in hot work environments.

Non-Work Related Factors

As noted earlier, fatigue may arise from factors that are not work related. A business has limited scope to influence worker behaviour outside of work, however, the following may be considered:

- develop a fatigue policy for all workers including managers and supervisors,
- consult workers about managing fatigue not just when at work, the risks associated with fatigue and how it relates to their health and safety duties.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to seek advice about this factsheet, please contact SAWIA on **+61 8 8222 9277** or **admin@winesa.asn.au**

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